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## Japanese Culture Now

# 日本のファーストフード その3: 回転寿司

## Japanese Fast Food Part 3—Kaitenzushi



Placed at each seat around the *kaitenzushi* counter is an *oshibori* (a moist towlette for cleaning one's hands), a small dish for dipping the sushi in soy sauce, a cruet of soy sauce, *tsume* (a sweet and tangy sauce to daub on items that have a plain flavor, like *anago*, or conger eel), disposable wooden chopsticks, a menu, *gari* (thinly sliced gingerroot pickled in sweet vinegar), etc.



Each customer pours his or her own tea. Customers take a tea cup from the ledge over the counter and put a tea bag of Japanese green tea in it. Hot water fills the cup when it is pressed onto the black plunger directly beneath the spigot in front of each seat.



The invention of the conveyor belt that carries the plates of sushi was inspired by the conveyor belts used in beer factories. To allow the belt to turn corners easily, the conveyor is made of half-moon-shaped segments. It is difficult to eat if the speed at which the sushi passes in front of you is too fast or too slow; one study found that six seconds is the optimum time for each plate to pass by a customer. In most *kaitenzushi* restaurants, the conveyor circles clockwise, apparently to make it easier for mostly right-handed customers to remove plates.



Sushi was once considered a luxury reserved for special occasions. What transformed that image of this now-popular dish was the introduction of *kaitenzushi* (conveyor belt sushi bars) in the city of Higashi Osaka in 1958.

*Kaitenzushi's* attractions are endless: you do not have to wait for your meal to be served, the price of each entrée—determined by the type of plate on which it appears—can be ascertained at a glance, it's enjoyable either alone or out as a family; it is low-priced, tastes good, can be eaten whenever the mood strikes, and so on.

There are said to be almost 5,000 *kaitenzushi* restaurants throughout Japan. Overseas, too, *kaitenzushi* is now a familiar feature of the dining landscape and has been adapted to suit a variety of locales worldwide, including New York, Sydney, Beijing, Seoul, Paris, and London.

Photos: Hongo Jin



Here the long conveyor belt carrying plates of sushi can be seen revolving in the center of the restaurant. The customers are seated on the outer periphery of the belt. From the entrées that pass before them, customers select and eat their favorite dishes.



## 平禄寿司

The Heiroke Sushi restaurant in Omotesando, central Tokyo. Patrons include many non-Japanese as well.

Website ☞ <http://www.heiroke.com/>

In recent years, the types of sushi offered at *kaitenzushi* outlets have increased, the quality has risen markedly, and many shops now emphasize the quality of their sushi entrées as a selling point. New types of sushi that were first developed overseas are also popular in Japan, such as the California roll, which uses avocados.



As they finish eating a sushi entrée, customers stack the used dishes as shown. When it comes time to pay, the cashier counts the number and type of plates in the stack to calculate the bill.



Salads, deserts (such as cake and vanilla custard pudding), yogurt drinks, and other food items are offered. Customers can also request specific kinds of sushi from the chefs behind the counter and order side dishes, such as fish-based or crab-stock soup.